

Employment equity and employee morale at a selected public service organisation in Cape Town, South Africa

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Orientation: Employment equity measures have been blamed for creating tensions in the workplace, impacting employee morale.

Research purpose: This study investigated the relationship between perceptions of employment equity and employee morale and whether these differed based on self-identified race and gender.

Motivation for the study: Given the negative impact of employment equity initiatives on employee morale, it was necessary to investigate the correlation between these variables.

Research approach/design and method: A quantitative research design was applied using self-administered questionnaires administered to 200 employees of a public service organisation. All questionnaires were returned; however, only 167 were usable.

Main findings: Significant correlations were observed between dimensions measuring employment equity and those measuring employee morale. Women held positive perceptions regarding the morale dimensions of management commitment and workload. White respondents viewed management commitment, professional development opportunities, respect for cultural practices and managers possessing the skills to manage a diverse workforce positively than non-whites.

Practical/managerial implications: The findings indicate employment equity initiatives correlate with employee morale. Human resource management within organisations should manage the process through which employment equity initiatives are implemented, taking cognisance of the impact on employee morale.

Contribution/value-add: This study contributes academically and practically. Academically, this study adds to the existing literature within the field of human resource management. There is a plethora of literature on employment equity; however, this study focuses on the impact it has on employee morale specifically for the public service organisation. This study thus fills the gap in literature about employment equity and employee morale.

Keywords: affirmative action; designated groups; employee morale; employment equity; previously disadvantaged.

Introduction and background

The apartheid regime (1948–1994) separated South Africans along racial lines regarding where they lived, went to school, worked and where they were buried (Van der Walt, 1994). During this era, South Africa (SA) was characterised by unfair discrimination (Hitchcock & Vinding, 2004), with different groups, including African, mixed race and Indians, not given access to the same educational or employment opportunities (Miller, 2000). The ruling political party at the time, the National Party of South Africa, implemented employment policies favouring persons classified as white people (Coetzee & Vermeulen, 2003). The government's migrant labour policies reinforced the view that non-whites were only acceptable working in a temporary capacity within a 'white environment' (Engdahl & Hauki, 2001), with black workers limited to mainly unskilled and menial work (Van der Walt, 1994).

South Africa finally saw the advent of democracy in 1994 (Van der Heyden, 2013), accompanied by the repeal of Apartheid laws (Smith & Roodt, 2003). Numerous laws were promulgated to rectify past injustices, the most significant being the *Employment Equity Act* (No. 55 of 1998) (EEA). The EEA aims to encourage equal opportunities, remove unfair labour practices and implement

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affirmative action (AA) processes to redress the past disadvantages experienced by designated groups (Hlongwane, 2013; Leonard & Grobler, 2006). Despite this, competing in the job market continued to be difficult for black people, women and people with disabilities (Mputa, 2016). This was predominantly because of differing apartheid-era education standards and quality (Nyoka & Lekalake, 2015).

However, many employment equity (EE) measures, such as preferential treatment and numerical goals, have become associated with negative connotations, such as 'a drop in standards', 'racism', 'unfair treatment', 'tokenism', 'reverse discrimination' and 'incompetence' (Motileng, 2004). These EE measures have created racial tensions and resentment in the workplace, thus detrimentally impacting employee morale (EM) (Jooste, 2014). Thus, this study investigates the correlation between perceptions of EE and EM, and whether these perceptions differ significantly on the grounds of race, gender and between white and non-white employees at a selected public service organisation in Cape Town.

Research purpose and objective

The primary objective of this study was to examine the relationship between EE and EM while also investigating whether perceptions of EE and EM differed on the grounds of self-identified gender and race.

The main objective of this study was:

- to investigate the relationship between perceptions of employment equity and employee morale among employees at a selected public service organisation in Cape Town.

In addition, the following sub-objectives were addressed, namely:

- Whether perceptions of employment equity and employee morale differ significantly based on self-identified gender?
- Whether perceptions of employment equity and employee morale differed significantly between white and non-white employees?

Literature review

Employment equity and affirmative action

While EE and AA are believed to be different concepts (Mayer, Oosthuizen, & Tonelli, 2019), they are both legislatively driven and represent proactive policies that undertake to rectify workplace inequalities on the grounds of race, gender and disability (White Paper for Post-school Education and Training, 2013). Thus, both EE and AA are necessary steps in rectifying past injustices, resulting in a more diverse workforce in both the public and private sectors in South Africa. For these reasons, the argument can be made that EE and AA are related concepts and are therefore used synonymously in this study.

History of affirmative action

The plethora of AA views and understandings resulted in two main points of views: some view AA as a way of granting preference to women, disabled people and particular racial groups, while others perceive it as a means to promote equal opportunities for all, regardless of race. The term denotes a process that is inevitably controversial and open to various interpretations that depend in part on one's personal beliefs, views and ideals. While some identify it as a means of ending the past inequalities (Matambo & Ani, 2015), others view it as a process that redresses poor education (Akala, 2019), prejudice (Dingindawo, Nwafor, Mutshaeni, Mudzielwana, & Mulovhedzi, 2016), racism and the unequal distribution of wealth (Leibbrandt, Woolard, McEwen, & Koep, 2010). Hence, it is not always clear what people mean when they use the term. According to the EEA No. 55 of 1998 (South Africa, 1998a), AA has usually been closely associated with issues of employment:

AA measures are measures designed to ensure that suitably qualified people from designated groups have equal employment opportunities and are equitably represented in all occupational categories and levels in the workforce of a designated employer. (p. 8)

Affirmative action first appeared in the 1940s in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Motileng, 2004). The central aim was to eliminate discrimination based on race, colour, sex, property, birth or other related statuses (Wingrove, 1995). The term AA became well-known in the 1960s after being introduced into popular discourse by United States President John F. Kennedy (McElroy, 2001). Laws were established to grant preferential access to education and employment for black Americans as a means to rectify the injustices of the past (Kivel, 2001). South Africa faced a similar scenario because of the political, social and economic injustices of Apartheid (Motileng, 2004). However, the implementation of AA has been controversial, with differing attitudes exhibited by those who benefitted instead of those who experience this as a threat.

Attitudes towards affirmative action

Debates around AA tend to revolve around two opposing ideas, freedom and equality (Gomez & Premdas, 2012). Supporters of AA believe in equality of opportunities for previously disadvantaged groups, while opponents argue that organisations should have the freedom to select the candidates best suited for them (Hlongwane, 2013). Crawford and Novak (2013) argued that AA recognises that past injustices have led to inequality in a society, while opponents such as Ballam (1997) argued that there should be no policies to attain true equality.

The way organisations manage AA practices and its impact on their success with employees' attitudes towards AA is critical (Fobanjong, 2001). Employees claim that AA reflects negatively on results leading to a decrease in standards and is perceived as reverse discrimination (Zondi, 2013). Similarly,

Oosthuizen and Naidoo's (2010) study found that employers often lowered job standards to achieve targets with AA candidates placed in positions for which they were not competent, thus impacting their morale. Consequently, the following hypothesis is put forward:

H¹: Perceptions of employment equity and employee morale among employees at the selected public service organisation in Cape Town correlate significantly.

Leopeng (1999) and Van der Merwe (2006) found that members of previously advantaged groups generally held negative perspectives on AA. Similarly, in Buthelezi's study (2011) white and Indian respondents felt that incompetent candidates were promoted because of AA. In turn, Rabe (2001) found that this belief demotivated both those who benefitted and those who did not benefit from AA. Human, Bluen and Davies (1999) argued that AA serves as a self-fulfilling prophecy because it sets up black people to fail, confirming the negative stereotypes.

The negative perception of AA and the belief that it harms merit-based systems are not limited to the SA context. Various studies, such as those conducted by Leck, Saunders and Charbonneau (1996), Bakan and Kobayashi (2000) and Kottke and Agars (2005) in Canada found that the majority of respondents believed that people should be hired or promoted solely according to their qualifications and abilities, while not considering their candidate's gender or race. Boonin (2011) similarly viewed that any decision to hire a less qualified, disadvantaged candidate over a more qualified white man violates his right to be judged on merit. Similarly, a study conducted by Katchanovski, Nevitte and Rothman (2015) in America found that 75% of non-white respondents felt that academic and career progress should be based on a combination of ability and talent rather than gender and ethnicity.

Likewise, Kottke and Agars (2015) found that employees generally harbour negative attitudes towards gendered AA. Men are less likely to believe that gender-based discrimination exists, while members of privileged groups are more likely to attribute their higher status to their merit and performance (Prasad, Mills, Elmes, & Prasad, 1997). Privileged individuals are often unaware of their unearned advantages (Sidanius et al., 1991). The targeted advancement of women intimidates male employees resulting in resistance because of perceptions that women's progress is a threat to their career progression (Konrad & Hartmann, 2001). Conversely, Konrad and Spitz (2003) found that men experience reverse discrimination, and that organisations perform poorly because of AA. Hettinger (1987) argued that reverse discrimination against white men is as evil as past discrimination against women and black people. It is against this background that the following hypothesis is postulated:

H²: Perceptions of employment equity and employee morale among employees at the selected public service organisation in Cape Town differ significantly on the grounds of self-identified gender.

Skedsvold and Mann (1996) argued that AA programmes increase the self-esteem of their beneficiaries in many instances by providing them with employment opportunities and a platform for growth. They found that only 10% of historically disadvantaged respondents felt that their abilities and skills had been questioned because of AA measures. Buthelezi (2011) found that members of previously disadvantaged groups' attitudes towards AA were the opposite of those who did not benefit from AA policies. Black employees generally did not express negative opinions about AA, while white respondents were more likely to believe that it led to the promotion of incompetent employees (Buthelezi, 2011). Similarly, Motileng (2004) found that most black employees viewed AA as a means of correcting past imbalances, believing that AA measures have brought forward opportunities for black people, thus enhancing their careers (Buthelezi, 2011; Colamery, 1998).

Black employees also reported receiving training and additional support because of AA (Buthelezi, 2011). Thus, AA is a tool to correct past imbalances, providing structural upward mobility for those previously excluded (Archibong & Adejumo, 2013). Discrimination is viewed as a part of AA, which is required to undo decades of unfair discrimination (Bhargava, 2008; Colamery, 1998). Positive attitudes towards AA rest upon two related propositions: AA serves to level the playing fields made uneven by previous injustices, and that fair discrimination is applied to achieve this (Harkoo, 2014).

The above section canvassed varying attitudes of AA among racial groups, emphasising the need for mitigating opposing views about the fairness of implementing the AA policy. In SA, this need has given rise to the creation of the EE Index criteria put forward by Jain and Hackett (1989), which has resulted in organisations needing to develop 'best practices' for the effective implementation of an EE plan.

Best practices for effective implementation of affirmative action

The concept of 'best practice' implies the notion of 'better than' compliance with EE. Simply put, EE compliance should be proactive and should meet more than the basic requirements of the legislation (Van der Heyden, 2013). These best practices served as the basis of the measuring instrument in the present study and are discussed next.

Training and development

An EE plan should be linked to training and development for an EE strategy to be effective, as this supports employers in aligning skills development to EE (Van der Heyden, 2013). To assist organisations to align skills development with EE, several measures such as the *Skills Development Act No 97 of 1998* (South Africa, 1998b) have been introduced (Esterhuizen, 2008).

Diversity management

Appreciation for and management of diversity in the workplace are advanced as important aspects of an effective EE strategy (Thomas, Cumming, Lattimer, & Plani, 1996). Diversity management relates to a strategy to find and develop a diverse workforce and inclusive workplace, while focusing on the skills, policies and competencies required to enhance employees' impact on the organisation.

Inclusive organisational culture

Ensuring an inclusive organisational culture is the goal of effective AA implementation (Meyer, 2018). Supervisors must attempt to create an inclusive organisational culture that appreciates diversity and promotes equity and staff retention (Human, 1993). The development of shared meaning demands that employees should invest in the organisation's vision and values, and engage in standard, expected behaviour towards colleagues.

Management commitment

The success of AA within SA is largely dependent on commitment from managers; hence, it is clear that this commitment, especially from top management, is vital for the effectiveness of any AA programme in bringing about organisational change and transformation (Twala, 2004). For AA to be implemented effectively, management should fully embrace its programmes and regard it as a business strategy and not simply as compliance (Van der Heyden, 2013).

Transparent communication

The EEA No. 55 of 1998 (South Africa, 1998a) requires that organisations should consult with stakeholders and make information pertaining to EE easily available to employees (Van der Heyden, 2013). Communication is perceived as a critical component of corporate transformation (Leonard & Grobler, 2006). Without effective communication, organisations will be unable to comply with the information responsibilities they bear in respect of their stakeholders and will not be able to implement their EE strategies successfully.

Justification and diversity management

Justice and fairness are simple requirements for the effective functioning of organisations, and hence employees' perceptions of the fairness of organisational practices impact their commitment and productivity levels (Coetzee, 2006). The AA programmes are organisational practices that employees judge in terms of fairness, and for this reason, employers need to be mindful of employees' perceptions of them (Cropanzano & Ambrose, 2015). Companies that provide effective justifications for a diverse workforce can limit hostile attitudes towards AA programmes (Kidder et al., 2004).

Fair employment practices

All employment practices such as the recruitment, selection, promotion and retention of employees from previously

disadvantaged groups must remain free of unfair biased practices; if not, these practices and their EE rationale will be at risk of foundering (Thomas, et al., 1996). Job requirements should be revised to ensure that the requirements predict job performance and are not used to exclude particular groups on the grounds of biased criteria (Twala, 2004).

The belief that AA harms a merit-based system and negative attitudes towards AA is discussed next.

Hettinger (1987) postulated that AA practices result in a violation of the rights of more qualified candidates being overlooked during selection processes. The relationship between AA and morale then comes into question, as researchers such as Marx (1998) are of the notion that AA has an overall negative impact on employee morale. Challengers of AA, such as Kellough (2006), suggested that hostility is caused between opposing groups as a result of AA (Carter, Lippard, & Baird, 2019) and maintained that this policy is detrimental to a society as, by entrenching ethnic divisions it may create bitterness and unhappiness. It may thus serve to worsen racial and ethnic tensions rather than improve them. It may also have a damaging impact on the recipients of AA, as it is arguably built on a system of race-based paternalism, and the outcome of this could be toxic, leading to hostility between the recipients of AA and those who are not advantaged by the policy (Lee, 2016). Considering the amount of time that employees spend in each other's presence, the forging of effective or hostile relationships in the workplace can directly impact EM.

White respondents questioned whether the policy actually ensured equal opportunities for all, as they believed that it penalised innocent whites for the wrongdoings of their ancestors; better known as a form of 'reverse discrimination' (Arrow et al., 2000). Their argument is that AA is immoral, simply causes further inequality between different races and is in fact inherently racist (Block & Mulcahy, 1997; Goldring, 2018). This finding is in line with an international standpoint, as data from a study by Jones et al. (2016) conducted in the United States show that a majority of the white American working class believes that reverse discrimination is the dominant racial bias in America (Newkirk, 2017). For this reason, the following hypothesis is put forward:

H₂: Perceptions of employment equity and employee morale among employees at the selected public service organisation in Cape Town differ significantly between white and non-white employees.

Employee morale

On an individual level, morale is a state of psychological well-being based on a sense of confidence, usefulness and overall purpose. On a group level, morale refers to the spirit of a group (Bowles & Cooper, 2009). A favourable attitude would be a sign of high morale, leading to a lower labour turnover, as employees are likely to resign, while an

unfavourable attitude would be an indication of low morale, resulting in inefficiency and unrest among employees (Matsaung, 2014). Employee morale is a complex phenomenon and can be affected by a number of factors, which were used as the scales to measure EM and are expanded upon next.

Recognition and regard

Financial compensation undeniably influences EM, but equally important is the praise and appreciation that employees receive (James et al., 2015). When employees are praised and appreciated by their peers and managers for their job performance, they experience a sense of belonging, achievement and significance, which consequently boosts their morale.

Working relationships

Many employees spend more time with co-workers than they do with their own family, so it is important for them to develop quality relationships with co-workers. Considering the amount of time that employees spend in each other's presence, the forging of effective relationships in the workplace can directly improve EM (). As co-workers become more friendly with each other, they look forward to spending time with each other arguing and 'back biting', which erodes EM significantly (Rockman, 2003).

Professional development

Professional development encourages staff to build on their skills, attitudes and knowledge, and is essential to boost EM. When organisations provide their staff with professional development opportunities, they are indicating that they have the best interests of their employees at heart and this feeling of support elevates EM (Meyerson, 2013). A lack of adequate support and feelings of being underutilised in jobs could, however, leads to low EM.

Autonomy and decision-making

Autonomy relates to the degree of freedom that employees enjoy while working, as opposed to their being micromanaged. Greater autonomy is often associated with more opportunities, which essentially improves EM and moreover, enables employees to handle stressful situations such as heavy workloads (Gashi, 2014).

Workload

Heavy workloads carry many implications for organisations throughout the world and often lead to low morale, which is a great concern (Turner, 2013). Employees can experience a hefty workload for numerous reasons, including retrenchments resulting in staff shortages, and therefore, more work for a decreased number of employees. This could undermine the relationship between management and employees and have a detrimental impact on EM, manifesting in workplace issues such as low productivity, absenteeism and employee turnover (Van der Hulst, 2003).

Affirmative action and employee morale

The apartheid government mandated discriminatory policies, and as the government in the past was actively committed to legislative discrimination, it is critical that the present South African government should become equally involved in eradicating these injustices. It is clear that there are mixed feelings about AA because supporters view it as a positive measure that has created developmental opportunities, while challengers perceive it to work against those who are not beneficiaries of the policy. One of the main difficulties of AA in the workplace is that it creates a stigma that previously disadvantaged employees are solely hired based on their gender or skin colour. This stigma thus questions the job competence of previously disadvantaged employees. Ultimately, this may create resentment in the workplace, affecting employee morale.

Morale versus motivation

Morale and motivation are inherently connected. To be motivated, one must have a high level of morale while motivating employees to increase their morale (Ngwane, 2010; Taillard & Giscoppa, 2013). Morale is a state of mind that depends on employees' attitudes towards their job, colleagues, employers and supervisors. Morale essentially leads to job satisfaction, and when job satisfaction is high, employees are less likely to resign, complain or become problematic (McConnell, 2010). Factors affecting morale pertain to the conditions that trade unions fight for, including salary, benefits, job security, work environment and general quality of life at work. Morale factors are represented in the lower three levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs: survival needs (such as shelter, food and water), safety needs (such as insurance, pension and job security) and social needs (acceptance by work colleagues) (Maslow, 1943). However, motivation is a cognitive drive generated when Maslow's two higher order needs are satisfied (Maslow, 1954). These are the psychological needs for self-esteem and self-actualisation (reaching one's full potential) (McConnell, 2010).

Certain motivational theories suggest that employees seek fairness regarding what they have contributed to their job. Adams' (1963) equity theory is premised on the notion that if employees perceive their inputs (e.g. challenging work, loyalty, etc.) are greater than their outcomes (job security, career development, etc.), they may experience decreased morale. Given the nature of EE, it is contended that non-recipients of EE (i.e. white men) will compare their input-output ratio with that of recipients of EE (i.e. black people, females and people with disabilities) and will, for the most part, construe that ratio as favourable to recipients of EE. According to equity theory, non-recipients will consequently attempt to restore a balance by either adjusting their input (e.g. decreasing productivity at work, etc.), output (battle for a promotion, etc.) or change their comparison group by resigning and moving to a different organisation.

Theoretical framework

Adams' (1963) equity theory suggests that people are happiest in relationships when their giving and taking is equal, emphasising the need to treat employees fairly. It has received substantial empirical support providing a sound basis for reviewing the motivational implications of perceived fairness and injustices within the working environment (Lloyd & Mertens, 2018). Thus, equity theory was selected as this study's theoretical framework, given that fairness is central to EE's implementation in SA to ensure that designated groups are represented equitably in the workplace. Equity theory, therefore, enables the study to explore how input transaction impacts morale among employees, given that AA is a concept that has the principle of equity at its core (Leonard, 2005).

Research methodology

Research design

This study is grounded in the positivist paradigm using a quantitative approach that applied a structured questionnaire in a survey design, which is positivistic in nature. It allowed for collecting data from a large sample of respondents simultaneously while being an inexpensive, quick and accurate way of assessing information about the population (Welman, Kruger, & Mitchell, 2005). The questionnaire comprised Likert-type questions that measured perceptions towards EE and morale. The questionnaire was distributed to employees in a selected public service organisation. The respondents' were provided with token incentives of chocolates to encourage participation. A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed; however, only 167 were usable. This study therefore had a response rate of 83.5%. Gillham (2000) asserted that if a response rate is below 30% in a questionnaire-based study, the validity of the study will be considered doubtful. The response rate in this study can therefore be regarded as highly satisfactory.

Research participants

The sample comprised ($N = 167$) respondents employed at the selected public service organisation. Availability sampling was utilised, with the majority of the respondents being men and identifying as black African, with the characteristics of the respondents reported in Table 1.

Measuring instrument

A self-administered questionnaire comprising questions with a Likert-scale response option that measured perceptions of EE and EM was used to collect the data for this study. Section A of the questionnaire was designed to collect respondents' biographical information. Section B of the instrument consisted of statements concerning EE dimensions, and Section C of the instrument consisted statements measuring factors that affect EM. The questionnaire was used in a previous study by Jooste (2014) in a South African context

to investigate and assess the impact of AA on the motivation of employees at a selected private organisation, and written permission was obtained from the author. The questionnaire was modified to suit the needs of this study. A four-point Likert scale was used to allow respondents a choice of four responses to reveal their agreement or disagreement with each item. A score was allocated to each choice, specifically 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = disagree and 4 = strongly disagree. Furthermore, the questionnaire contained both positively and negatively worded questions, thus maintaining the interest and attention of respondents.

The questionnaire consisted of a total of 59 items, of which 30 items measured nine dimensions of EE, which are linked to EE best practices as established: 'inclusive organisational culture, management commitment, transparent communication, fair employment practices, training and development, gender equity and justification and diversity management'. The section measuring perceptions of employee morale consisted of 29 items measuring five dimensions of morale: workload, professional development, working relationships 'and autonomy and decision-making'. An example of items measuring EE is shown in Table 2.

An example of items measuring EM is listed in Table 3.

TABLE 1: Characteristics of respondents ($n = 167$).

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	103	62
	Female	64	38
Race	African	94	56
	Mixed race	39	24
	White people	22	14
	Indian	5	4
	Other	1	2

TABLE 2: Example of employment equity items measured.

Dimension	Item
Inclusive organisational culture	The diverse strategy of the organisation enables it to be an employer of choice.
Management commitment	My supervisor does not set a good example for everyone to follow.
Transparent communication	The company supplies me with reliable and sufficient information on diversity.
Fair employment practices	Recruitment and selection practices (such as advertising positions, promotions, etc.) that are applied in my department are unfair to all.
Training and development	My supervisor regularly discusses my work performance with me.
Gender equity	Men and women have equal opportunities to advance within the company.
Justification and diversity management	The need for diversity is recognised in our organisation.

TABLE 3: Example of EM items being measured.

Dimension	Item
Recognition and regard	I am not given informal praise and appreciation when I do things well.
Workload	The amount of work I am given is unrealistic.
Professional development	I would be supported if I applied for study leave.
Working relationships	There is a good spirit of camaraderie among my co-workers.
Autonomy and decision-making	I am an active participant when important decisions are made.

The measuring instrument was both valid and reliable. A reliability test was conducted to measure internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The questionnaire measuring perceptions of EE obtained an overall Cronbach's reliability score of 0.92, whereas the questionnaire measuring EM achieved a Cronbach's alpha score of 0.93, both considered by Burns and Burns (2008) to be strongly reliable. Majority of the reliability coefficients for the various sub-scales were acceptable with varying Cronbach's alpha scores between 0.48 and 0.93. All but one scale (justification and diversity management) had acceptable Cronbach's alpha scores. In this case, each item of the scale that never had an acceptable Cronbach's alpha score was considered for principal axis factoring to test the applicable hypotheses for the study. Both sections of the instrument therefore comfortably exceeded the general acceptance level of 0.75.

In terms of validity, content and construct validity was tested and assured by evaluating the validity of the EE and EM scales. Content validity in this study was assured as the questionnaire represents the content discussed in the literature review. Furthermore, all statements were worded as clearly as possible, rendering them unambiguous and not misleading. Construct validity was assured by conducting a factor analysis using a Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO), which discovered patterns among the variables measured and clustered them together. The KMO for adequacy ranged from 0.56 to 0.84, meaning all scales excluding 'justification and diversity management' were suitable for factor analysis. The factor analysis method employed in this study was the most commonly used one, namely principal component analysis, justifying their grouping.

Population and sample

This study identified the target population, a large public service organisation, within the Western Cape, which had undergone a number of EE initiatives and has sufficient numbers of personnel belonging to both designated and non-designated groups. The researcher selected a sample using availability sampling.

Statistical analysis

The statistical package for social sciences (IBM SPSS) (V.25) was used to analyse the data. The analysis had recourse to mean, standard deviation (SD), skewness and kurtosis as measures of dispersion of the data obtained. However, the inferential statistical methods applied included the Pearson correlation coefficient, Independent samples *t*-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). These statistical strategies were used to assess the accuracy and significance of the answers to the study's research questions.

Research procedure

A less commonly used yet effective method of administering questionnaires known as the 'drop-off and pick-up' method was employed in this study. This entails the hand delivery of

questionnaires to sampled units by the researcher, who also retrieves the completed questionnaires at a later stage. A meeting was set up with the area co-ordinator to discuss the nature of the study in detail, with emphasis placed on the distribution of the questionnaires. After the meeting, the area co-ordinator alerted employees in advance about the study to take place. The researcher personally distributed questionnaires to respondents and retrieved them on the same day. Respondents were given approximately an hour to complete the questionnaires, which were then collected at an agreed time. Brown (1987) argued that the awareness that someone would be coming back with the sole intention of receiving the completed questionnaire puts psychological pressure on the respondent to complete the questionnaire.

Ethical considerations

A number of ethical steps were taken in this research study in order to guarantee the moral acceptability of this research study, including obtaining formal ethical clearance and permission from both the public service organisation and the university ethics committee. During the data collection process, respondents were informed of the purpose and nature of the study and were given the right to refuse to participate and withdraw at any time. Respondents were assured about privacy and confidentiality, and the measures taken to ensure this, such as avoiding asking respondents for any information that could identify them and storing all hard copies of data in a locked cabinet.

Results

Descriptive statistics and reliability analysis

Tables 4 and 5 present a summary of the key descriptive statistics of EE (Table 4) and EM (Table 5) scales by presenting means and SD.

The EE dimensions had similar means, all below the midpoint of 2.5, ranging from $M = 2.10$ ($SD = 0.81$) for inclusive organisational culture to $M = 2.35$ ($SD = 0.61$) for transparent communication. The data were reasonably normally distributed, with a skewness ranging from -0.03 to 0.56 and a kurtosis ranging from -0.65 to 0.05 .

The EM dimensions had similar means, with the majority below the midpoint of 2.50, ranging from working relationships ($M = 2.16$, $SD = 0.82$) to autonomy and decision making ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 0.88$). The data were reasonably

TABLE 4: Descriptive statistics of employment equity dimensions ($N = 167$).

Dimension	IOC	MC	TC	FEP	TAD	JADM			
						RCP	RND	POD	SMD
Mean	2.10	2.31	2.36	2.22	2.38	2.37	2.28	2.60	2.13
SD	0.811	0.84	0.61	0.67	0.82	0.97	0.90	0.81	0.90
Skewness	0.57	0.05	0.080	-0.03	0.18	0.31	0.45	-0.08	0.40
Kurtosis	0.060	-0.66	-0.20	-0.36	-0.44	-0.84	-0.50	-0.43	-0.59

SD, standard deviation; IOC, inclusive organisational culture; MC, management commitment; TC, transparent communication; FEP, fair employment practices; TAD, training and development; JADM, justification and diversity management; RCP, respect for all cultural practices; RND, recognising the need for diversity; POD, perception of diversity; SMD, skills to manage a diverse team.

normally distributed, with a skewness ranging from 0.13 to 0.48 and a kurtosis ranging from -0.66 to 0.50.

Correlations between employment equity and employee morale

The correlation between the different dimensions of EE and EM is presented in Table 6. There were positive and significant ($p < 0.01$) correlations between the majority of the EE and morale dimensions that ranged from $r = 0.266$ (autonomy and decision-making and skills needed to manage a diverse team) to $r = 0.620$ (recognition and regard and fair employment practices).

In this study, a strong relationship between EE and EM was found ($r = 0.790$). Thus, the hypothesis that perceptions of EE would correlate with EM at the selected public service organisation in Cape Town (H1a) was supported.

TABLE 5: Descriptive statistics of employee morale dimensions ($N = 167$).

Dimension	RR	PD	WR	ADM	WL
Mean	2.34	2.34	2.16	2.47	2.43
SD	0.59	0.78	0.82	0.88	0.56
Skewness	0.31	0.26	0.48	0.13	0.29
Kurtosis	-0.02	-0.25	-0.14	-0.66	0.50

SD, standard deviation; RR, recognition and regard; PD, professional development; WR, working relationships; ADM, autonomy and decision making; WL, workload.

TABLE 6: Correlations between employment equity and employee morale dimensions.

Dimension	IOC	MC	TC	FEP	TAD	JADM			
						RCP	RND	POD	SMD
RR	0.408**	0.584**	0.500**	0.505**	0.620**	0.537**	0.479**	-0.045	0.443**
PD	0.412**	0.476**	0.414**	0.530**	0.626**	0.588**	0.463**	0.024	0.307**
WR	0.336**	0.467**	0.457**	0.538**	0.506**	0.509**	0.463**	-0.029	0.338**
ADM	0.331**	0.345**	0.381**	0.413**	0.504**	0.466**	0.373**	-0.032	0.266**
WL	0.359**	0.434**	0.406**	0.426**	0.537**	0.426	0.290**	0.020	0.284

IOC, inclusive organisational culture; MC, management commitment; TC, transparent communication; FEP, fair employment practices; TAD, training and development; JADM, justification and diversity management; RCP, respect for all cultural practices; RND, recognising need for diversity; POD, perception of diversity; SMD, skills to manage a diverse team; RR, recognition and regard; PD, professional development; WR, working relationships; ADM, autonomy and decision making; WL, workload.

**, correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

TABLE 7: Comparison of employment equity and employee morale perceptions between self-identified men and women.

Dimension		Levene's test for equality of variances		t-test for equality of means						
		F	Sig.	T	df	Significance level (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Standard error difference	95% confidence interval of the difference	
IOC	EV	0.764	0.383	1.281	165	0.202	0.165	0.128	-0.089	0.419
MC	EVN	-	-	2.319	117.699	0.022	0.317	0.137	0.046	0.589
TC	EV	0.154	0.696	1.562	165	0.120	0.151	0.097	-0.040	0.343
FEP	EV	0.930	0.336	1.383	165	0.168	0.146	0.106	-0.062	0.356
TAD	EV	1.307	0.255	1.467	165	0.144	0.190	0.129	-0.065	0.447
RR	EV	2.202	0.140	1.763	165	0.080	0.163	0.092	-0.019	0.347
PD	EV	0.074	0.787	0.909	165	0.365	0.113	0.124	-0.132	0.358
WR	EV	0.016	0.899	1.621	165	0.107	0.211	0.130	-0.046	0.469
ADM	EV	0.101	0.751	1.070	165	0.286	0.149	0.139	-0.126	0.424
WL	EVN	-	-	2.032	118.460	0.044	0.187	0.092	0.004	0.369
RCP	EV	0.034	0.855	1.385	165	0.168	0.212	0.153	-0.090	0.515
RND	EV	0.072	0.789	0.705	165	0.482	0.102	0.144	-0.183	0.386
POD	EV	0.152	0.698	-0.931	165	0.353	-0.118	0.127	-0.370	0.133
SMD	EV	0.233	0.630	0.609	165	0.544	0.087	0.143	-0.195	0.369

IOC, inclusive organisational culture; MC, management commitment; TC, transparent communication; FEP, fair employment practices; TAD, training and development; RCP, respect for cultural practices; RND, recognising the need for diversity; POD, perceptions of diversity; SMD, skills to manage a diverse workforce; RR, recognition and regard; PD, professional development; WR, working relationships; ADM, autonomy and decision-making; WL, workload; EV, equal variances assumed; EVN, equal variances not assumed.

The bold figures represent the statistically significant values.

Correlations based on the self-identified gender

The second objective of this study was to investigate the correlations between perceptions of EE and morale based on self-identified gender, the results of which are presented in Table 7. Only two factors, namely management commitment, $t(3) = 2.31$, $p = 0.022$ and workload $t(03) = 2.03$, $p = 0.044$, correlated significantly ($p < 0.05$). As only two of the tested dimensions were statistically significant, this supposition (H^2) is not accepted.

The third objective was to explore whether perceptions of EE and morale differed significantly on the grounds of race (Table 8).

Correlations based on self-identified race

Only four of the tested dimensions were statistically significant: management commitment $t(31) = -2.31$, $p = 0.027$ professional development $t(45) = -2.82$, $p = 0.007$, respect for cultural practices $t(44) = -3.50$, $p = 0.001$, and skills needed to manage a diverse workforce $t(37) = -2.27$, $p = 0.029$. Thus, there was no evidence to support the hypothesis that respondents' perceptions on EE and EM between white and non-white employees are statistically significant, with no significant correlations achieved. As a result, the hypothesis (H^3) of this research study cannot be accepted.

TABLE 8: Comparison of employment equity and employee morale perceptions between white and non-white employees.

Dimension		Levene's test for equality of variances		t-test for equality of means						
		F	Sig.	T	df	The bold figures represent the statistically significant values (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Standard error difference	95% confidence interval of the difference	
									Lower	Upper
IOC	Equal variances assumed	3.424	0.066	-1.203	165	0.231	-0.218	0.181	-0.578	0.140
MC	Equal variances not assumed	-	-	-2.316	31.081	0.027	-0.404	0.174	-0.760	-0.048
TC	Equal variances assumed	0.338	0.562	-0.096	165	0.923	-0.013	0.138	-0.286	0.259
FEP	Equal variances assumed	4.462	0.036	-0.656	165	0.513	-0.098	0.150	-0.395	0.198
TAD	Equal variances assumed	11.684	0.001	-1.046	165	0.297	-0.192	0.183	-0.555	0.170
RR	Equal variances assumed	7.235	0.008	-1.424	165	0.156	-0.187	0.131	-0.446	0.072
PD	Equal variances not assumed	-	-	-2.824	45.752	0.007	-0.338	0.119	-0.579	-0.097
WR	Equal variances assumed	1.595	0.208	-1.289	165	0.199	-0.237	0.184	-0.602	0.126
ADM	Equal variances assumed	4.323	0.039	-0.190	165	0.850	-0.037	0.197	-0.427	0.352
WL	Equal variances assumed	1.049	0.307	-0.761	165	0.448	-0.096	0.126	-0.347	0.153
RCP	Equal variances not assumed	-	-	-3.509	44.528	0.001	-0.524	0.149	-0.826	-0.223
RND	Equal variances assumed	5.715	0.018	-1.111	165	0.268	-0.226	0.203	-0.626	0.175
POD	Equal variances assumed	0.809	0.370	-0.216	165	0.829	-0.039	0.180	-0.394	0.317
SMD	Equal variances not assumed	-	-	-2.275	37.758	0.029	-0.354	0.156	-0.670	-0.039

IOC, inclusive organisational culture; MC, management commitment; TC, transparent communication; FEP, fair employment practices; TAD, training and development; RCP, respect for cultural practices; RND, recognising the need for diversity; POD, perceptions of diversity; SMD, skills to manage a diverse workforce; RFR, recognition and regard; PD, professional development; WR, working relationships; ADM, autonomy and decision-making; WL, workload; EV, equal variances assumed; EVN, equal variances not assumed.

The bold figures represent the statistically significant values.

Discussion

The results confirmed the first hypothesis (H¹) that perceptions of EE and morale correlate positively. Affirmative action seeks to correct the demographic imbalance in SA's workforce by compelling employers to remove barriers to the advancement of Africans, mixed race, Indians, women and disabled persons (Grogan, 2008). However, this objective evidently has an impact on employee's morale, as one of the main difficulties of AA in the workplace is that it creates a stigma that previously disadvantaged employees are solely hired based on their gender or skin colour. This stigma can create questioning the job competence of previously disadvantaged employees. Ultimately, this may create resentment in the workplace, thus affecting employee morale.

The second hypothesis (H²), namely that gender correlated with EE and EM, was partially confirmed. Women experienced both management commitment and workload more positively, meaning that they felt their supervisors were overall good leaders and set a good example for employees, while men felt that they could not trust their supervisors. Regarding the workload, men believed their workload to be unrealistic and were shared unfairly, whereas women believed staffing levels were adequate for workloads and these workloads were evenly distributed.

The third hypothesis (H³) that perceptions of EE and morale differ based on race was also partially confirmed. White people were more positively inclined towards management commitment when compared with mixed race/Indians/Asians/, while black Africans had more positive perceptions of transparent communication than that of mixed race/Indians/Asians. This indicates that white employees believed their supervisors set a good example for employees to follow as opposed to mixed race/Indians/Asians, who

believed that their supervisors were not consistent in the way they treated employees. Moreover, black African employees felt the company was serious about equal opportunities for all races, while mixed race/Indians/Asians believed company has not supplied employees with reliable and sufficient information about diversity. This finding challenged literature, for instance, Van der Merwe's (2006) finding that management is generally committed to recruiting and placing non-white employees in senior positions, thereby making white employees feel insecure and discriminated against.

Black Africans viewed fair employment practices more positively than their mixed race/Indians/Asians counterparts, while white respondents viewed these more positively than their mixed race/Indians/Asians counterparts. This suggests that Black African employees believed the company's selection criteria are justified in relation to job requirements, and in addition, recruitment and selection strategies applied in their departments are fair to all. This finding challenges Esterhuizen's (2008) study, which found that black Africans were more pessimistic about the fairness of employment practices than mixed/Indians/Asians. White (2015) suggested that black African employees receive extra scrutiny from their managers, resulting in unfair discrimination, lower wages and in severe cases, job losses. The key finding in this study, therefore, challenges this expectation.

White respondents also viewed access to training and development opportunities favourably than their mixed race/Indians/Asians compatriots. Black African respondents had positive perceptions concerning working relationship than their mixed race/Indians/Asians counterparts. This implies that mixed race/Indians/Asians felt their supervisors do not assist them to develop their full potential and high achievers were not recognised for their achievements, whereas white respondents felt contrary to

this and believed their supervisor regularly discussed their work performance with them. In addition, black African respondents felt that there was a good spirit of staff camaraderie among co-workers and they felt part of a team, while mixed race/Indians/Asians felt that they were not supported by their colleagues and they could not speak to their supervisors if something concerns them. This key finding aligns with previous research studies by Buthelezi (2011) and Oosthuizen and Naidoo (2010). Their research showed that white employees felt they were equipped with relevant training and development. In contrast, non-white employees were negatively inclined, believing not all employees were provided with relevant training and development opportunities. The main concern from non-white employees, according to Oosthuizen and Naidoo (2010), was the lack of access to training and development opportunities.

With regard to the respect for cultural practices, white respondents felt more positive than black Africans and mixed race/Indians/Asians, and white respondents had positive perceptions regarding the skills managers need to manage a diverse workforce, as opposed to mixed race/Indians/Asians. This difference in perception was anticipated by Janse van Rensburg and Roodt (2005) who reported that employees from previously disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to encounter disrespect and discrimination concerning their culture in the workplace. The culture concerned may well attach to a specific religion (Muslim, Hindu etc.). However, white employees generally experience less discrimination and are more positive in their perceptions of respect for cultural practices (Vallabh & Donald, 2001). This key finding is also in line with a research study conducted by Coetzee (2015), who found that employees from designated groups believe that they are shown little respect in the workplace.

Limitations and recommendations

This research study was limited to one public service organisation, and as a result, its research findings are limited to this organisation. This limits the degree to which the findings can be generalised to other organisations. It is suggested that future research should make use of a larger sample that includes both public sector and private organisations so that the findings can be more broadly generalised.

The sample size of this study contained 167 respondents. It is recommended that future research endeavour to embark upon a larger sample scale to increase the degree to which the results of the research could be generalised. A key limitation in this study was that some employees declined to participate (despite considerations of privacy and confidentiality being made clear), as this research study was of a sensitive nature, which had the consequence of a lower questionnaire response rate.

Conclusion

This primary aim of this research study was to investigate the relationship between perceptions of EE and EM, and whether these perceptions differ significantly on the grounds of race or gender at a selected public service organisation. This study confirmed a robust positive correlation between EE and morale, thus contributing to the literature and practice of human resource management. There were significant differences between the perceptions of men and women pertaining to the commitment displayed by management and the equal distribution of workloads. There were statistically significant differences between racial groups relating to management commitment, transparent communication, fair employment practices, training and development, professional development, working relationships, respect for cultural practices and skills needed to manage a diverse workforce. White and non-white respondents had significantly different perceptions concerning management commitment, professional development, respect for cultural practices and skills needed to manage a diverse workforce.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

The authors of this article contributed by conducting this original study, including (but not limited to) identifying the research problem, obtaining ethical clearance to conduct the study, execution and collection of data, conducting descriptive and inferential statistics, recommendations and conclusions. Moreover, they all contributed to supervision, editing and reviewing of the final article.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (No. 2017FBREC495) along with Department of Correctional Services ('gate-keeping organisation') both provided ethical clearance to conduct the research, as it met research and ethical requirements of both institutions.

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Data availability

This data obtained is available and in storage. To protect respondents' identity, unique identifiers were not asked during data collection.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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